



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS December 16, 2015

Those who regularly read this column already know that I'm a huge fan of Seinfeld, the television program whose legendary Christmas episode introduced us to "Festivus." The brain-child of Frank Costanza, this entirely made-up holiday was his odd-ball rebuttal to the usual year-end Christmas frenzy and included a number of offbeat but laughable "traditions." One of the most beloved is the "airing of grievances" which allows people to share what's bugging them completely unfettered. So in light of the holidays I'd like to air my own grievance, one I suspect is shared by quite a few people.

As a state senator, I review tons of media each and every day in an effort to stay up on current events. And each and every day I am both disappointed and dismayed by what I call the "War on Everything." Not a single day goes by that someone, somewhere isn't protesting, or complaining, or regulating away some imagined offense or slight in the name of political correctness. At this point it's so widespread that it's beyond silliness and it becomes especially prevalent at this time of year when our religious celebrations are pitted against just about everything else mainstream from television to shopping to how our public spaces are decorated.

Just this week we were treated to the Sunset Park, Brooklyn principal who banned any mention of Santa Claus, the pledge of allegiance and even Thanksgiving from her school. She was sure to throw in any mention of angels or stars as both could somehow be

misconstrued as a religious evangelization. And in case you thought this syndrome only affected grammar schools, the University of Tennessee's Office of Diversity and Inclusion sent out a student and staff email to ensure holiday parties were not Christmas parties in disguise. Their intrusive recommendations went so far as to suggest "refreshment selection should be general, not specific to any religion or culture" and proclaimed that "holiday parties should not play games with religious or cultural themes," such as "Dreidel" and "Secret Santa."

Then, just this morning I read about the Texas student who was banned from wearing his new Star Wars shirt in school because the image of its futuristic laser violated the school's policy on violent images. To quote the child's father, "It's political correctness run amok. You're talking about a Star Wars t-shirt, a week before the biggest movie of the year comes out. It has nothing to do with guns or making a stand. It's just a Star Wars shirt."

To be sure, being inclusive and kind are noble endeavors. But inclusive doesn't mean doing away with what matters to one group of people for the sake of another. It means allowing everyone to celebrate their own beliefs and values simultaneously. Like anything else taken to the extreme, political correctness, although well-intentioned, becomes dictatorial. It ignores the fact that we will never all be alike nor can we be scrubbed free and sanitized of the things that matter to us. Besides, how dreary a world would that be?

No, ours is a very imperfect and sometimes ugly world and believe it or not, Santa Claus, and angels, and stars, and Thanksgiving, and Chanukah, and Kwanza, and Ramadan, and Halloween and even something as corny as a Stars Wars t-shirt make it just a little more bearable. It doesn't mean someone seeks to diminish another. It just means different things matter to different people and the beauty of this great country of ours was that we believed there was room enough for all of that. Sadly, that might be changing.

So here's a simple holiday thought for all of us: why not exchange "political correctness" for just some old-fashioned "correctness." Make room for everyone else and their values, not just demand room for you and yours. Wish people a Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, Happy Kwanza, Happy Ramadan or even just good health and happiness. And receive those well wishes as gracefully as they were given. Remember that in the end, people are just extending their warmth and kindness to you – no matter what you call it. In closing, I wish all of you all of the above. If it brings you any happiness or peace at all, I wish it for you.

And for all my fellow Seinfeld fans out there, Happy Festivus!